

lin

*Reverend Alexander Simms
with J. M. D. best respects.*

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO.

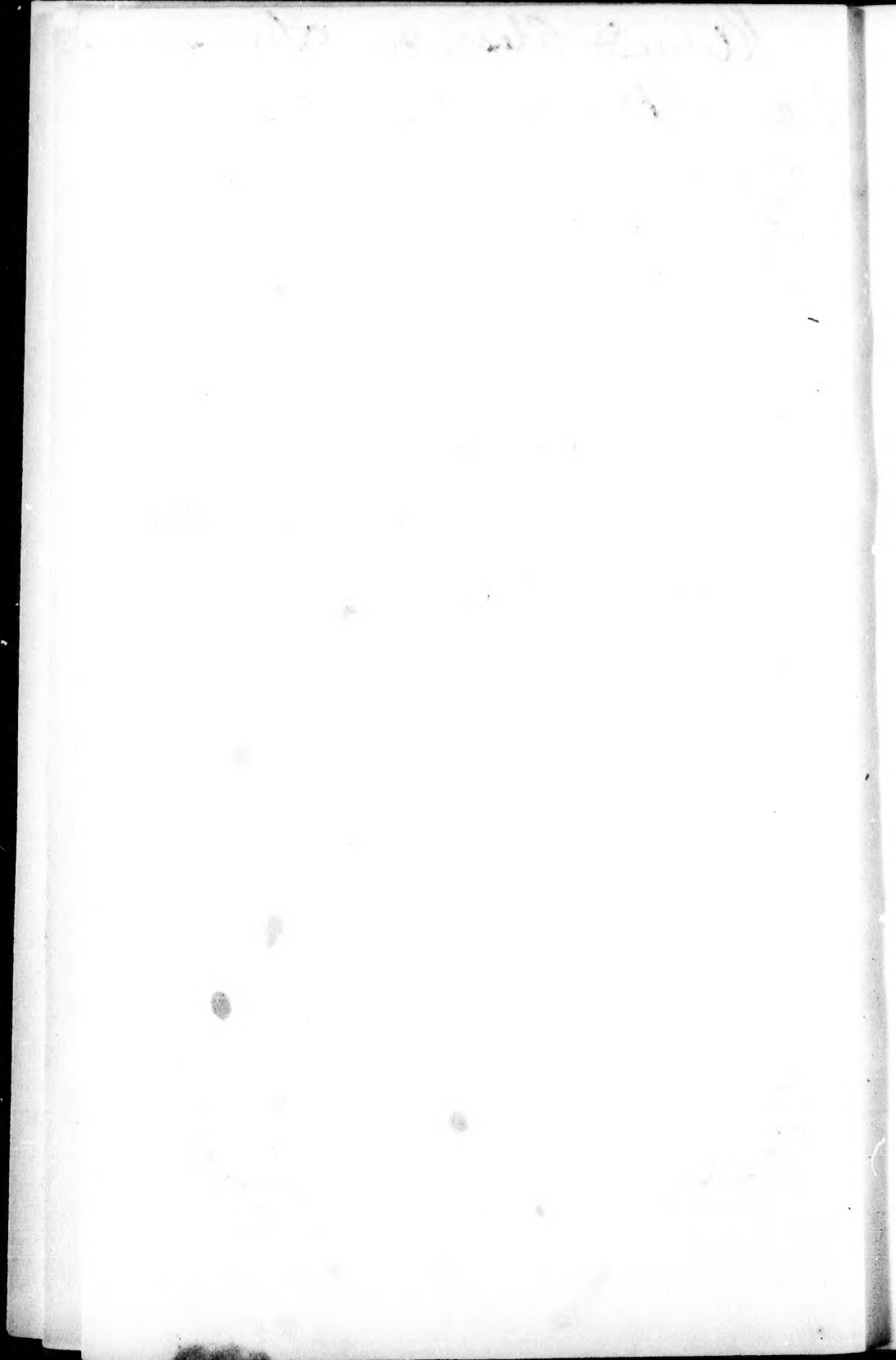
Prize Poem:

LOSS OF THE PACIFIC.

READ IN THE UNIVERSITY HALL OF CONVOCATION,
JUNE 26TH, 1857.

TORONTO:
ROWSELL & ELLIS, KING-STREET.

1857.





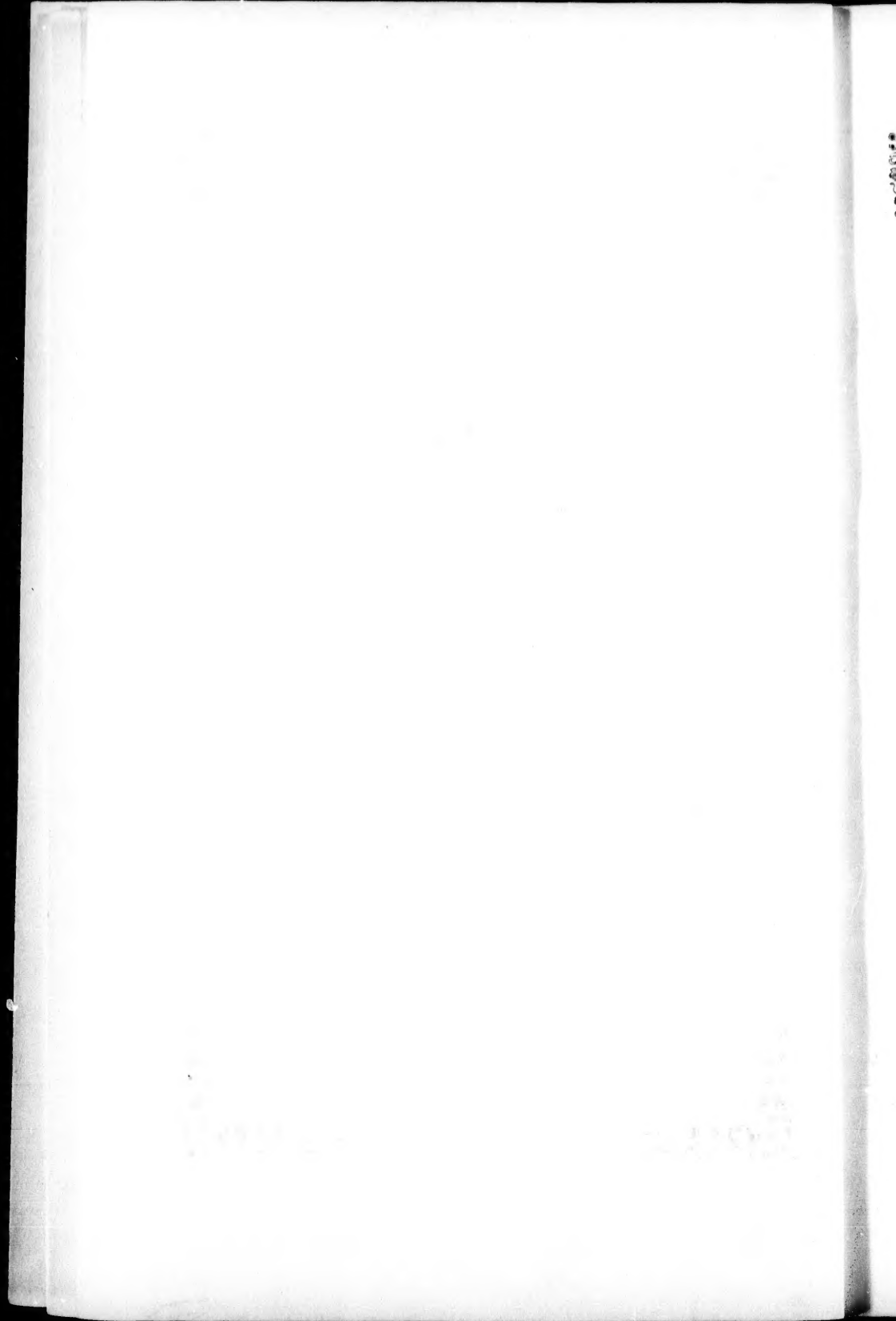
Prize Poem.

LOSS OF THE PACIFIC.

"WRITTEN WITH LITTLE SKILL OF SONG-CRAFT",
HOMELY PHRASES, BUT EACH LETTER
FULL OF HOPE."

HIAWATHA.





LOSS OF THE PACIFIC.

PRELUDE.

How pitiful that Poesy so oft
Should choose herself the mournful cypress wreath,
And tune her lyre to utter strains of woe !
Albeit, methinks, she never wears so sweet
And smooth a speech, what time to some cool spot,
By the wide-arching bough o'erhung, she points
Her laurelled sons, and, seated in the midst,
The count of human sorrows runneth o'er,
Weaving a winning tale of human tears.

Such was the scene, and such the choice of song
That passed before me in a waking-dream ;

And what there met mine ear I now essay
To reproduce in words,—with many flaws,
Omissions and defects ; since memory
Hath failed in part to do her perfect work.
The fisherman heaps up along the shore
The battered morsels of a noble ship,
That overnight went down amid the storm ;
The curious in antique lore collect
From ancient mounds old coins, worn well-nigh
smooth,
And seek to gain the secrets of the past :
So seek I to decipher characters,
On the mind's tablet half-obliterate ;
Such rescued fragments do I here set forth.

LOSS OF THE PACIFIC.

There was a ship, such as the sailor's eye
Loveth to dwell upon, freighted with life
For this new continent ; most precious life :
Age, youth and infancy. Such like as these
Were grouped to journey o'er the watery ways :
The babe unweanéd from its mother's breast,
And the strong man whose arm was nerved to hew
A broad highway into the pathless forest ;
Aged sires, with reverend beard and hair blanchéd
white,
Whose eyes, from studious toils withdrawn, took rest,
Deep-sunken in the caverns of the mind ;
And gentle maidenhood, whose lustrous glance
Revealed a hidden treasury of love.

Then on her lonely path the ship went forth,
And waves 'gan murmur to the gliding keel ;
While follows in her wake the voice of prayer,
As loving lips breathe blessings on her course.

How many were the thoughts of future weal
That each one cherished in his breast, and thus
Through hope secured what might be never his !
How oft a distant home, a loved one's face,
Was summoned forth in soul-sustaining vision !
So each was cheered amid his loneliness.
For who that having life, hath not withal,
Secreted in some corner of the mind,
A little hoard of happiness, which forth
To gaze upon in lonely hours he brings
With still-increasing joy and eagerness ?

But 't was in solitude, through night, at times
In which man's soul is turned upon itself,
That thoughts like these came in upon the mind,
Welcome as the pure-plumaged birds that wing
Themselves nigh to a labouring ship, then hover—
Until they choose some fitting spa., whereon

At last they settle, and bring comfort to
The hearts of sea-tossed mariners.

Albeit,

The eye needs not be always turned within
Searching for joy, since other scenes of beauty
May minister a comfort to the mind,
Not unparticipated in by those
Whom chance or settled purpose hath joined with us.
Under our gaze Nature hath placed a book,
The which to rightly read is to rejoice—
Whose linked words bind man to his fellow-man,
Each to the other binding with one joy,
A common and unceasing joy. So thought,
So spake they, as they drew contentment from
The sights of air and sea. And chiefest these,
More than aught else, gave happiness to all :
Morn after morn they watched the sun's uprising,
Beautiful as the smile of innocence
That lightens up the face of sleeping babes ;
And evening after evening, as he sunk
Embosomed 'mid the gorgeous-tinted clouds,
They watched the trail of brightness that he left

Along the sea. Such radiance, erewhile,
Across the Galilean waters lay,
Glittering 'mid darkness, like a shaft of gold,
To glorify our Saviour's path, and mark
Unto the wondering eyes of fishermen
Where the waves met and kissed those sacred feet.

* * * * *

Hark ! 'tis the dash of billows that we hear,
And the hoarse roaring of the maddened waves,
As they run up on the sandy beach and fling
Their foam against the rocks. Doth not the sea
Wax white with rage ? Doth not his bosom burst
With pent-up violence of wrath ? And lo,
On distant cliffs how leaps his throbbing pulse !
Perchance, ye seek the ship amid the storm,
Or ask what fate befel the voyagers.—
Go, ask the sea-mews as they wheel and wheel
Around the plunging ship, with harshest shrieks
Rivalling the cries of agony beneath !
Go, question ye the snow-enveloped peaks,
That lay their brows against the cold blue sky
And with their feet thrust off the rolling waves,

For they have watched from lofty eminence
And kenned the far-off strife ! Thus much man
knows :

All perished on the deep ; all passed away
As a dream fleeth at the morning-hour,
Nor leaves a trace, save in man's memory ;
All coffined in the ark they trusted to,—
While sullen waves boomed requiem o'er the dead.

* * * * *

Tears are flowing from eyes that rolled in gladness ;
And tears are wasting pale the bloom of beauty ;
Unwonted tears trickle adown the furrows
Which Time hath ploughed in the wan cheek of age ;
And tears from widowed wives rain sorrow down
Upon the parted lips of smiling babes.
Full many a haughty heart, now smitten by
Affliction's rod, pours forth its gush of grief
Which, through a desert world, the mourner's feet
Followeth,—like the rock-born stream of old :
But bearing on its waves no healing balm.

Yet was there one of that bereavéd band
Who sorrowed not, as those that have no hope ;

For ever at the morn she bent her steps
Unto the ocean's marge, deeming that there
She might be nearest *him*, who was by day
The close companion of her thoughts,—but whom
She saw and held sweet converse with, soon as
Her weary eyelids closed in sleep. Alas!
Day after day she homeward turned, uncheered,
Unsatisfied ; and, straightway when she passed,
The guilty and remorseful sea, all-trembling,
Smoothed o'er her tracks with layers of golden silt.
Clouds gathered in her atmosphere of Love ;
Her little bark of Hope could not live through
The storm of Doubt ; and dim uncertainty,
Half-hiding all from view, rose like a mist ;
And with Hope faintly seen, she gained a store
Of sadness ; and with sadness came long hours
Of bitter thought, and pale, tear-moistened cheeks.

It chanced one night a dream visits her sleep ;—
A dream, laden with all the woeful tale
Of shrieks and horrid sights out on the sea,
Lays on her brain that fearful load, and flees.
Oh, with what terror startled did she brush

Sleep's finger from her eyelids, when the burden
Weighed heavy on her soul ! She now guessed all.
E'en as a wandering wayfarer, who stumbles
Along some craggy path at midnight hour,
What time the gathering storm hath veiled the moon,
Sees no remembered mark to guide his steps,
Till from a thunder-cloud the quivering blaze
Dashes a glare of light upon the scene :
So with blind hands this maiden groped her way
Amid the darkness of uncertainty,
And where she was, or whither hastening,
Knew not, until the gloom was pierced by Truth.
Then brought she forth to those who hurried in
Her dream, with such low utterings as might fall
From Sorrow's lip ; the while heart-aching sobs
Rose 'mid the even current of her speech,
Like rocks that upward thrust a ragged edge,
And part in twain the flowing of a stream.

From that time forth the lady pined away.
Each morning saw her paler than before ;
And in dark night that grief revealed itself
Which shunned the glare of day. At length they
knew

That she must pass from earth ; and round her couch,
Whereon so white, so still, so beautiful
She lay, all those who called her "friend" were
gathered.

Love smoothed her pillow with a noiseless hand ;
While on her lip meek Resignation laid
A smile ; and Faith lent brightness to her eye.
New Hopes, withal, those visitants from above,
Pilgrimed with sister Hopes, which long had dwelt
Within the sanctuary of her breast.
Thus guarded, and supported thus, she died.
The pure soul, like a snow-flake, melted from
Her body, and the wings of clustering angels
Made music as they bore it unto Heaven.

They chose, the youths and maidens chose, a spot
Hard by the sea,—a hill they chose, whose sides
Ran down right to the waves ; and on the top,
Where grass and flowers and shells were inter-
sprinkled,

They buried her, heaping a mound to mark
Her grave unto the passing traveller.—

So sleep they all, the mourning and the mourned,
Lapped in the dreamless quietude of death.
She, on her hill-side couch, where the young sun
Sheds his first beams and choicest influence ;
And they, huddled along shell-sprinkled valleys,
Which in the ocean's depth their windings lead
Betwixt the weed-clad sides of unseen hills :—
So sleep they in the quietude of death.
So shall they sleep, unheeded and unknown
By those who follow in our steps—those in
The long procession of Futurity.
But they shall rise again,—shall cast aside
The weight of untold centuries of time,
And the accumulated dust which year
Succeeding year hath piled upon their bones.
The voice that said of old to Lazarus,
“Come forth,” shall speak in awful tones once more.
Each grave shall yield its inmate at the sound,
Nor sea nor earth shall then withhold its dead :
These bursting from their sepulchres, and those
Disparting watery shrouds, shall flock together.
Yea, all the dead shall walk the earth again,
And meet with denizens of by-past ages

At every step. Or to unite with these
Their lives, or be dissevered—who can tell?

What lesson teacheth, then, the shipwrecked bark?
'Tis that we should so live that every hour
May serve to round our life with perfectness ;
So that the unguessed fracture of our days
May give to view a surface, smooth and shapely.
And yon grave on the hill—what teacheth it ?
That the most beauteous buds are culled from earth,
Eternally to bloom in Paradise.

J. A. BOYD.





ark?

arth,

